

LORD RUSSELL'S WAR CRIMES TRIBUNAL

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The RAND Corporation

Bertrand Lord Russell, until recently active in the affairs of the British Committee for Nuclear Disarmament, has set forth at the age of 94 on a new venture. He now proposes to "try" President Johnson, Rusk, McNamara and others for war crimes against the people of Vietnam. Because no international agency existed to carry out such a project, the Russell Peace Foundation created an "International War Crimes Tribunal." It is scheduled to meet in the Palais de la Mutualité in Paris for a twelve-week session beginning in April. Whatever its outcome, the trial is certain to provide embarrassments for the Government of the United States.

After a distinguished career in mathematics and philosophy, Russell set himself up as an unofficial adviser and expert on world affairs. The results have

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been mildly astonishing and reflect on his consistency as well as on his qualifications as an impartial witness or judge.

Back in 1937, when World War II threatened, Russell proposed that Nazi troops should be welcomed as "tourists" in case Hitler invaded Britain. He thought that "whatever damage the Germans could do us would not be worse than the damage done in fighting them, even if we won." The Nazis would find some "interest" in the English way of life and somehow "the starch would be taken out of them." The Danes, who followed this policy in 1940, found that it entailed heavy costs.

In 1948, after the Soviet leaders had refused to accept the Baruch proposals for controlling nuclear weapons, Russell thought that it would be "worthwhile" for the United States and other countries to threaten preventive war against Russia in order to force them to adhere to the Baruch proposals. Since one cannot make threats without being prepared to carry them out, this meant that Russell would then have sanctioned nuclear war against Russia in order to achieve nuclear disarmament.

After Russia developed atom and hydrogen weapons, Russell gave what he called "fresh thought" to the problem and came to the conclusion that the West could not defeat Russia "except by defeating ourselves." Faced by what he thought would be the "extermination of mankind" in the event of nuclear war, Russell then wrote:

I am for controlled nuclear disarmament, but if the Communists cannot be induced to agree to it, then I am for unilateral nuclear disarmament even if it means the horrors of Communist domination.

Activities on behalf of the Committee for Nuclear Disarmament and its radical offshoot, the Committee of 100, led Russell to sponsor civil disobedience in the early 1960's. Failing to convince any important Western political leader of the wisdom of unilateral nuclear disarmament, Russell made a series of attacks on them in April 1961. He said:

We used to call Hitler wicked for killing off the Jews, but Kennedy and Macmillan are much more wicked than Hitler. The idea of weapons of mass extermination is utterly horrible and is something which no one with one spark of humanity can tolerate.

I will not pretend to obey a Government which is organizing mass massacres of mankind. I will do everything I can to oppose the Government in any way which I think can be fruitful and I exhort you to do the same.

We cannot obey these murderers. They are wicked. They are abominable. They are the wickedest people who ever lived in the history of man and it is our duty to do what we can against them.

From Brixton prison, where he spent seven days in September 1961 on a civil disobedience charge, Russell condemned the leaders of all nuclear powers saying:

There are supposed to be two sides, each professing to stand for a great cause. This is a delusion. Kennedy, Khrushchev, Adenauer, De Gaulle, Macmillan and Gaitskell, are pursuing a common aim: The ending of all human rights. You, your families, your friends, and your countries are to be exterminated by

a common decision of a few brutal but powerful men. To please these men, all private affections, all public hopes, all that has been achieved in art and knowledge and thought... are to be wiped out forever....

Although he occasionally condemned Communist leaders, Lord Russell was strongly anti-American. This led him to assert that America not only "dominated other countries" but that its leaders pursued policies of mass extermination. In 1963 he wrote:

The United States...imposes intolerable regimes on Asian, Latin American, and Middle East countries, and economically exploits the great majority of mankind who live at below-subsistence level to support American profit. Similar things can be said about the Soviet Union, but Americans need reminding of the nature of the society they inhabit....The American government pursues a policy of genocide.

When challenged to list the countries on which the United States had imposed intolerable regimes, Russell named: Vietnam, South Korea, Thailand, Paraguay, Peru, Chile, Ecuador, Bolivia, Guatemala, Haiti, Formosa, and Spain.

Russell feared that the power of the Pentagon and militarists would plunge the world into nuclear war. After quoting what seemed to him to be preventive war suggestions from Admiral Arthur W. Radford and General Orvil Anderson, Russell, forgetting his own proposals in 1948, equated these statements with the leadership of America and said:

These men speak for power. The military technology and the power of decision are in their hands. We in Britain are not prepared to place the future of our species in the hands of semi-literate paranoids compulsively

acting out their sick hates and their blind malice.

Russell's view of American institutions was illustrated by the introduction he wrote to the British edition of Corliss Lamont's Freedom is as Freedom Does in 1956. In it he said:

Members of the FBI join even mildly liberal organizations as spies and report any unguarded word. Anybody who goes as far as to support equal rights for colored people, or to say a good word for the UN, is liable to be visited by officers of the FBI and threatened, if not with prosecution, at least with blacklisting and consequent inability to earn a living....

This led Norman Thomas to conclude that Russell's "exaggeration" was "so great as to approach falsehood," and that he used "the blackest possible paint in depicting the American scene."

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Naturally Russell's fears were acute during the Cuban crisis in 1962. Then what Sidney Hook has called his "almost pathological anti-Americanism" led Russell to condemn American efforts to prevent the extension of Russian nuclear weapons to an area hitherto free of them. He found himself in the unusual position for a nuclear disarmament advocate of favoring the extension of Russian nuclear weapons into Cuba.

Russell's partisanship was revealed in the way he dealt with the principals in the Cuban crisis. To

Kennedy he wired:

YOUR ACTIONS DESPERATE. THREAT TO HUMAN  
SURVIVAL. NO CONCEIVABLE JUSTIFICATION.  
CIVILIZED MAN CONDEMNS IT. WE WILL NOT  
HAVE MASS MURDER. ULTIMATUMS MEAN WAR.  
I DO NOT SPEAK FOR POWER BUT PLEAD FOR  
CIVILIZED MAN. END THIS MADNESS.

To Khrushchev he wired:

MAY I HUMBLY APPEAL FOR YOUR FURTHER HELP  
IN LOWERING THE TEMPERATURE DESPITE THE  
WORSENING SITUATION. YOUR CONTINUED  
FORBEARANCE IS OUR GREAT HOPE. WITH MY  
HIGH REGARDS AND SINCERE THANKS.

Blaming the entire crisis on the United States, Russell  
issued a statement to the English people on October 24,  
1962, in a leaflet put out by the Cuban Embassy. It  
read:

YOU ARE TO DIE

not in the course of nature, but within  
a few weeks. And not you alone, but your  
family, your friends, and all the inhabitants  
of Britain together with many hundreds of  
millions of innocent people elsewhere.

WHY?

Because rich Americans dislike the  
Government that Cubans prefer, and have used  
part of their wealth to spread lies about  
it....

Russell's line of action in the Cuban crisis was  
tortuous. At first he denied that there were Russian  
missile bases in Cuba and declared that American  
photographs showing them were fakes. Later, after the  
Russians admitted there were missiles in Cuba, Russell  
defended them on the ground that they were short-range

"defensive" weapons necessary to prevent an American invasion.

Russell went out of his way to praise Khrushchev after the crisis saying:

I say to Premier Nikita Khrushchev that mankind owes him a profound debt for his courage and his determination to prevent war due to American militarism....I cannot praise sufficiently the sanity and magnanimity, the willingness to do all required to solve this overwhelmingly grave crisis.

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The Cuban crisis was followed by a Chinese invasion of northern India and Russell quickly turned his attention to this crisis. During the month of November 1962 and until the Chinese withdrawal he wrote a series of messages to Nehru and Chou En-lai urging them to agree to a cease-fire. To assist him he called in such strange "peacemakers" as President Sukarno of Indonesia and Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana. Though Khrushchev, Chou En-lai, and Nehru replied to some of Russell's messages, there is no evidence that they were influenced in any way by them. Like everybody else, Russell was surprised at the sudden Chinese withdrawal.

The Cuban crisis and the Chinese invasion of India strengthened Lord Russell's conviction that a world government was necessary to prevent wars of mass destruction. Shortly afterward he set up the Russell Peace Foundation to "study" international relations and be in a position to "advise" statesmen, as he had done



in the autumn of 1962. An American supporter of the Committee for Nuclear Disarmament, Ralph Schoenman, became his secretary and leading assistant. He expressed his anti-Americanism by writing:

The United States has bullied, starved, invaded, and blockaded the island of Cuba. A big country has sought to destroy a small one because it fears the social system in existence in the small one.

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On June 11, 1966, Lord Russell sent messages to Hanoi and to the Viet Cong announcing a forthcoming trial of President Johnson. He accompanied his announcement with a statement of "warm regards" for President Ho Chi Minh and a wish that the day might not be far off when a united and "liberated" Vietnam might be celebrated in Saigon. The American leaders, Russell charged, had deliberately resorted to "concentration camps, torture, massacre, poison gas and chemical warfare against the Vietnam people." Their purpose in Russell's words was to "protect the interests of American capitalism." Schoenman's language was more colorful if less accurate. He said that the American forces were in Vietnam to act as "company cops to protect stolen property."

On August 28, 1966, Russell wrote to President Johnson asking him to appear in his own defense before the International Tribunal. His letter, which seemed to condemn the President in advance, said:

Within living memory only the Nazis could be said to have exceeded in brutality the war waged by your Administration against the people of Vietnam, and it is because this war is loathed and condemned by the vast majority of mankind that demands are heard throughout the world for a formal international tribunal to hear the full evidence.

Russell at first decided that only authorized representatives of the U.S. Government would be heard in rebuttal at the trial. He later changed this to permit the hearing of evidence from any source. Teams of observers and interrogators were sent to North Vietnam to collect "evidence." The New York Times correspondent Harrison Salisbury met one of them in Hanoi.

Ignoring the purges of Ho Chi Minh and the tens of thousands of villagers murdered by the Viet Cong, Russell went on the Hanoi radio to broadcast messages to the American troops in Vietnam condemning their leaders and their participation in the war. He repeated the kind of atrocity stories he rejected as "implausible" in World War I. When asked if South Vietnam would be permitted to submit evidence to the International Tribunal, Russell said that there would be representatives without making clear whether they would be from the Viet Cong or Government of South Vietnam.

Russell's associates were vague about where the money to finance the tribunal was coming from except to say that it was not coming from "governments." Ironically two-thirds of the income of the Russell Peace Foundation, which is financing the so-called "trial,"

is said to come from American sources. Other important contributors are said to have been President Ayub Khan of Pakistan, who is reported to have twice given \$12,000 to the Foundation, and the Atlantic Peace Foundation, which is registered as a charity. Lord Russell has helped by making over the income from some of his books to the Foundation.

Before the tribunal held its preliminary meeting in London on November 16, 1966, it suffered from organizational troubles. Four of the most distinguished sponsors of the Peace Foundation announced their resignations. These were Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, Presidents Nyerere of Tanzania, Kaunda of Zambia, and Senghor of Senegal, who according to Russell "yielded to intolerable pressure from the United States." This was quickly contradicted by President Nyerere, who denied that pressure had been put on him to resign, and who complained that he had not been consulted in advance about the use of his name in connection with the proposed war crimes trial. At the same time Danilo Dolchi, the Sicilian social reformer, resigned from the tribunal.

The make-up of the tribunal seemed to be as follows: Lord Russell, honorary president; Jean-Paul Sartre, executive president; Vladimir Dedijer, the Yugoslav historian, chairman. There has been some talk that Mark Lane, whose film Rush to Judgment was partly financed by the Russell Peace Foundation, might serve as a "legal aide." Other members included: Gunther Anders, German author; Wolfgang Abendorth of Marburg University; Mehmet Ali Aybar, President of the far-left

Turkish Worker's Party; Mahmud Ali Kasuri, general secretary of the West Pakistan Awami Party; Lelio Basso, an Italian socialist parliamentarian; Lawrence Daly of the Scottish National Union of Mineworkers; Simone de Beauvoir, the French writer; Lazaro Cardenas, former President of Mexico; Dave Dellinger, an American pacifist and editor of Liberation; Isaac Deutscher, a Polish-born biographer of Trotsky; Stokely Carmichael, the champion of Black Power; Amado Hernandez, poet laureate of the Philippines; Kinju Morikawa of the Civil Liberties Association of Japan; Shoichi Sakata, Nobel prize winner; and Laurent Schwartz, French mathematician. They were described by Ralph Schoenman as "men of considerable intellectual stature."

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Things did not go well at the preliminary meeting of the International Tribunal in London on November 16, 1966. Several members of the tribunal did not attend. Lord Russell was thirty minutes late for the meeting and then he merely read a speech copies of which had already been handed to the press. In it he said:

I can recall many wars. Much injustice has been recorded quietly during these decades. In my own experience I cannot discover a situation comparable....I do not know any other conflict in which the disparity in physical power was so vast. I have no memory of any people so enduring, or of any nation with a spirit of resistance so unquenchable. I will not conceal from you the profundity of my admiration for the people of Vietnam.

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Ralph Schoenman, who took over the meeting after Russell left, said that the tribunal would be an autonomous body which would decide its own procedures, look for patterns of evidence, and report the necessary conclusions. He saw five broad areas of inquiry. These would be the crime of aggression; the use of gas, chemicals, and napalm weapons; the bombing of civilians; the torture of prisoners; forced labor camps and the scorched earth tactics of the Americans and South Vietnamese.

Amado Hernandez declared that American aircraft were dropping four million pounds of bombs on the Vietnamese people every day. The Americans and their South Vietnamese allies, he asserted, had crowded eight million peasants into encampments under the political police. Reporters who wanted to know such mundane things as who would pay the plane fares of North Vietnamese representatives were given no clear information. One reporter after the meeting was over said it would have been more rewarding "to interview a comedian."

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Russell has likened the tribunal to the commission headed by the American philosopher John Dewey in the 1930's, which heard evidence about the purge trials in Stalinist Russia. Sidney Hook, however, pointed out the basic difference between the two "trials." Russell's tribunal has drawn up an indictment against Johnson and others and will try them. In normal courts, the same court does not indict and try the accused. In a letter

to the New York Times of October 6, 1966, Russell defended the International Tribunal as a "grand jury" considering evidence in order to draw up an indictment. He was so resentful of criticism about his procedure that he suggested that those who made the criticisms were in some way responsible for crimes against the people of Vietnam. He wrote: "I suggest that those who raise procedural points in objecting to the International War Crimes Tribunal would be better occupied in assessing their own responsibility for the horrendous acts against the people of Vietnam." Russell's own views on the guilt of leading Americans were made clear in his recently-published book, War Crimes in Vietnam, which says virtually nothing about Viet Cong acts of violence.

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It is by no means clear that the men involved in the proposed trial are all stooges, or that Lord Russell or Ralph Schoenman can control the findings of so diverse a panel. The men supporting Russell and the members of the tribunal are not easily classified as "Communists." The only thing predictable about the trial is that it will be "another anti-American jamboree."

The trial may be an embarrassment to the United States, but if the program of twelve weeks of hearings is adhered to, boredom may soon set in. On the other hand, if it should occur at a time when negotiations are taking place to terminate the war, the "trial" might conceivably

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have an adverse effect upon them. This probably will not worry the Tribunal which seems to be more interested in condemning the United States than contributing to the restoration of peace.

